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On Henry Nowak's murder

Racist riots & gutless liberals

The brutal murder of 18-year-old Henry Nowak, stabbed five times by a young Sikh man, Vickrum Digwa, together with the disgusting treatment the police inflicted on a dying Nowak, has inflamed the country. This murder is but one of the many awful knife killings happening every year in Britain. But it has taken on huge political proportions because it directly intersects the deep polarisations tearing the country apart and reflects starkly where Britain is going.

For socialists, it isn't enough to just note how tragic Nowak's death is or how awful the police reaction was, and then move on. Yes, we must oppose the ban on the kirpan and denounce the scapegoating of Sikhs. But we cannot stop at these points.

This event, and the reaction to it, must serve as a wake-up call. What we are seeing is an acceleration of the wave of right-wing reaction engulfing the country, fuelled by the rot of liberal ideology, and a left wing that has zero clue about what is going on. Socialists must understand what is behind these events and stop burying their heads in the sand.

What the murder reveals

First of all, the reaction to the murder underlines just how rotten the whole liberal system is. EDI initiatives, so-called anti-racist training and all these liberal trappings are finished. Right-wing pundits and the hierarchy in the police are using the moment to trash every "woke" programme, to lift perceived restraints on racist policing. For decades, successive liberal politicians put in place "anti-racist" training and jargon under the grotesque illusion that this would turn the police into some anti-racist force. This never stopped racist policing. Nor did it change anything about police contempt for poor working-class people, including whites. It just wrapped all of this in a veil of hypocritical language about "anti-racism", which sowed the seeds for the huge right-wing backlash now erupting into the open. Liberal ideology directly fuelled the discourse on "two-tier policing".

Secondly, the demonstrations and reaction to the murder, particularly among working-class communities, have shown just how deep anger at the status quo runs. And it shows once again that this anger finds its expression almost exclusively in reactionary chauvinism. Many more working-class people identify with the reactionary fury spewed by Farage, Tommy Robinson, or Rupert Lowe than with the liberal platitudes served by Labour leaders, Green Party heads, or Corbyn. Today in Britain, it is the far right that responds to the deep anger and sense of revulsion at the status quo among working-class communities. The most obvious sign that we are in a mounting wave of reaction is that Farage was forced to tack even more to the right—declaring that the murder should be responded to with "pure cold rage"—because the main pressure on him is Restore Britain, a party that thinks Reform UK are a bunch of softies.

Thirdly, the reaction of the Sikh community and religious leaders, as well as those of Muslim and anti-racist organisations, lays bare how disarmed minorities stand. With the condemnation of the murder, all statements pleaded about how Sikhs are "a deeply valued part of British society" (Sikh Federation UK, 22 May), how they too espouse British values and appeal to multicultural Britain and liberal tolerance. As the threat of racist mobs beating up Sikhs, Muslims and immigrants raises its head again, the so-called leaders of minority groups are repeating the most tepid and liberal clichés.

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Fourthly, as this disaster is unfolding, the so-called socialist left is totally oblivious to the danger ahead. Typical, boring statements are issued (probably written by AI). Meanwhile, most socialists are busy building Zack Polanski's Green Party, the archetype of woke liberal Britain. Some are even campaigning in Makerfield for Andy Burnham—the once-Blairite, once-Corbynite turncoat who would sell his mum to become PM. The Socialist Workers Party and its front group Stand Up to Racism (SUTR) are regularly organising canvassers in the constituency to "Use your Vote to Stop Reform UK".... Guess who they tell people to vote for??

There is almost no awareness among socialists that ***the main reason*** workers are turning en masse to the far right is because socialists have embraced liberal politics and keep backing liberal politicians. In fact, many left-wing activists deny that working-class people, including huge layers of trade union members, are turning to the far right! Enough with denials of reality. Enough with sleepwalking to disaster.

A wake-up call

What the reaction to Nowak's murder shows is that immigrants and socialists urgently need to ditch all this liberal rubbish which paralyses us and fuels the right. What is needed is to urgently prepare for the huge battles ahead and place our camp in a strong defensive position.

Sikhs, immigrants, and particularly Muslims, have to be clear: the country is moving in a direction where racist violence is becoming more and more common. Liberal appeals for tolerance will not stop racists from breaking your skull. And the police will obviously not protect you. Self-defence groups and networks must be organised or reinforced ***against*** the liberal pacifism of religious leaders and SUTR, who are like sheep walking to the slaughterhouse.

This is what thousands of courageous young Sikhs and other minorities did in the 1970s: following the murder by fascists of Gurdip Singh Chaggar in 1976—50 years ago almost to the day—they broke with their then community leaders who were preaching the same submission as today, and organised the Southall Youth Movement, a self-defence organisation to drive the National Front out of their community.

Polanski's Greens will not stop Farage. Andy Burnham even less. These politicians are working to save the very liberal status quo that working-class people are rejecting. The longer socialists and working-class fighters stay associated with these people, the more it will fuel the far right's appeal.

Trade unionists must fight to stop funding the Labour government, and fight the union bureaucrats who are propping it up. They are the same people who constantly sabotage any struggle against the bosses, which also fuels the far right.

The 57 varieties of communist groups have to stop ignoring each other and actually work together. There are various initiatives to create a new left organisation underway. Get involved and fight as hard as possible for a break with liberal politics on a socialist basis.

Enough of liberal anti-racist activism. For years, SUTR, now rebranded the Together Alliance, has sought to fight racism by forging alliances with discredited Labour politicians and calling "racist" anyone who does not support open borders. This destructive moralism has been a disaster, making millions in working-class communities hate the left.

Of course, in the face of fascist violence, we need the broadest unity. But the socialist movement urgently needs to develop a real strategy to win over the millions of workers who are looking to Reform and the far right. This starts by understanding that most of these are not irredeemable racists. There is a deep, legitimate anger in working-class communities over Broken Britain and social decay. For many, the far right simply appears like the only radical option. And there is also a real and legitimate anger over how immigration has been used by the ruling class to drive down workers' living standards. This is what the far right is exploiting, and they can do so ***because*** the left simply dismisses this discontent as racism.

The unity of the working class cannot be built through liberal moralising. While conceding nothing to racist prejudices, socialists must make the case that it is the City of London which has destroyed this country. And it is the City of London which benefits from using immigrants as cheap labour. And therefore, an alliance between foreign- and native-born workers against the banks and capitalists is the ***only way*** to fix Broken Britain and stop the downward spiral of reaction. This isn't that hard to explain. What is hard is to get rid of all the liberal rubbish clogging the minds of most activists in this country.

Nowak's murder was horrible enough. But the reaction to it gives a little taste of what the future of this country will look like. Socialists and anti-racist activists must change course. Too much time has been wasted. ■